DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 259 679 HE 018 607

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TITLE Introducing Non-Faculty Flextime in Higher Education. AIR 1985 Annual Forum Paper.
PUB DATE May 85
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research (25th, Portland, OR, April 28-May 1, 1985).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Employment Practices; Feasibility Studies; *Flexible Working Hours; Higher Education; Institutional Research; Needs Assessment; *Personnel Policy; *School Personnel; Standards; *Technical Institutes
IDENTIFIERS *AIR Forum; *Midlands Technical College SC; Noninstructional Staff

ABSTRACT

Results of a feasibility study of implementing flextime for nonacademic staff at Midlands Technical College are presented, along with implementation outcomes. Surveys were administered to staff and department heads, as well as to state agencies that had administered flextime. Findings include: (1) 95.6 percent of nonacademic staff favored a flextime policy; (2) 73.6 percent of nonacademic staff perceived the policy as convenient and workable, while 21.3 percent foresaw no impact, and 5.1 percent considered it inconvenient and not workable; (3) 80 percent of department heads favored and 20 percent opposed the flextime policy; (4) about half of state agencies used some form of flextime; and (5) no state agency saw flextime as ineffective. It was decided that core hours would be from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., with telephone coverage from 8.00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The personnel office was assigned overall administration of the policy. During the pilot phase of flextime implementation, no problems were reported. A total of 54.7 percent of nonacademic staff maintained their regular work hours. In contrast to survey responses indicating that 45 percent preferred to work from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00, only 15 percent actually did so. The flextime policy did not allow banking of hours or variability of hours daily or weekly. Flextime guidelines are appended. (SW)

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INTRODUCING NON-FACULTY FLEXTIME IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Paper delivered at the twenty-fifth Forum of the Association for Institutional Research, Portland, Oregon, April 30, 1985

HE 018 607

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THE ASSOCIATION FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

This paper was presented at the Twenty-Fifth Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research held at the Portland Hilton in Portland, Oregon, April 28-May 1, 1985. This paper was reviewed by the AIR Forum Publications Committee and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC Collection of Forum papers.

Elizabeth F. Fox, Chair
Forum Publications Editorial
Advisory Committee

I. Introduction

It is well documented that higher education is in a time of challenge. Declining enrollment, increased costs, scarcer resources, and increased competition are elements of that challenge. Mere survival is at stake for many postsecondary institutions. Retrenchment is inevitable for many of even the stronger institutions.

These factors can have a negative effect on staff morale. Higher education staff pay increases have not kept up with inflation as in earlier, more prosperous eras. Opportunities for realistic professional advancement in higher education have become more limited. Advancement opportunities in higher education will be even more limited and competitive in the future.

In short, non-traditional personnel innovations should be sought in higher education to increase morale and productivity. Given prevailing financial scarcity, non-financial incentives for improving the postsecondary work environment are good options to motivate staff without high costs.

Flextime is one such option.

Flextime is a system of working which allows employees to choose their own hours, thereby coordinating their own schedules within certain limits set by a particular agency. (Finkle, 1979)

II. Case Study

Midlands Technical College is a two-year public technical college in Columbia, South Carolina. It is one of sixteen two-year colleges in the state's technical education system. It offers certificate, diploma, and associate degree programs. Its de facto function is that of a community college. It has 176 faculty and 203 staff.

The issue of flextime was first formally considered by the Business Affairs quality circle. A quality circle is a voluntary participative management group whose members meet an hour weekly to solve problems in their work area by structured analytical methods which attain group consensus. The Business Affairs group was one of two quality circles operating in a pilot project beginning April, 1984. The pilot effort was to demonstrate the effectiveness of quality circles college-wide. For the initial demonstration of the quality circle problem solving model, the Business Affairs circle selected the problem of employee tardiness. Flextime was selected as the best solution to this problem.

The quality circle process requires extensive research on a solution. A management presentation is the culmination of the quality circle problem solving process. The advantage is that a decision is required one way or another on the group's proposed solution.

It was decided that for a proposal as all-encompassing as flextime the management presentation shoud be made to the College President, Dr. James R. Morris, Jr. Thus, the proposal would have to be well-researched as to need and feasibility of implementation.

A. Need and Feasibility Assessment

The research on flextime need and feasibility was as follows:

1 - Surveys

a. Midlands Technical College Non-academic Staff and Department Heads

b. State Government Agencies

2 - Existing State Procedures

3 - Literature Search

4 - Existing Personnel Policies, Procedures and State Agency Flextime Experiences

A survey was designed to assess sentiment toward flextime by college non-academic personnel. Separate surveys were constructed for staff and department heads. Another survey was designed to assess the impact of flextime on state agencies which had implemented it.

The surveys were administered by telephone by members of the quality circle from June 20 to July 17, 1984.

The college-wide survey of non-academic personnel found overwhelming sentiment for non-academic flextime among both department heads and staff.

B. Non-Academic Staff Survey

It was found that 95.6 percent favored a policy of flextime, while only 4.4 percent opposed it. A total of 73.6 percent perceived the policy to be convenient versus 5.1 percent considering it inconvenient, with 21.3 percent foreseeing no impact.

To the question of whether the policy would affect work in the area, 73.6 percent felt it would help, 5.1 percent felt it would hurt work in their area, and 21.3 percent felt there would be little impact.

When inquired as to choice of flextime hours, the following preferences were found:

	1st Choice	2nd Choice
7:30 - 4:00	45.1%	11.0%
8:00 - 4:30	33.9%	41.7%
8:30 - 5:00	14.2%	29.7%
9:00 - 5:30	6.8%	17.5%

Thus, a surprising rate initially expressed preference for the 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. flexible hours. Two-thirds expressed preference for work hours other than their existing hours. Support for a flextime policy was overwhelming among non-faculty staff.

C. Non-Academic Department Head Survey

For non-academic department heads the survey results were only slightly less favorable. The favor to oppose rate was 80 percent to 20 percent.

State Government Agencies

All state agencies were surveyed for their experience with flextime. Generally, the personnel director of each agency was the contact person. For small agencies, the agency head was the contact.

The survey found roughly half of state agencies utilizing some form of flextime. Most initially adopted it in the late 1970's with concern for transportation problems associated with the energy crisis. The survey found no state agencies eliminating flextime after previously implementing it. No state agency surveyed saw flextime as ineffective. There was found to be 70 percent of flextime-using state agencies finding it very effective and 30 percent finding it somewhat effective.

D. Existing State Procedures

The state guidelines for variable work hours were stated in terms of the purpose" to alleviate severe traffic congestion and delays during peak traffic hours..." They are found as Appendix A.

A convenient model for establishing flextime procedures for Midlands Technical College was that of the central coordinating office, for the state's sixteen technical colleges, the State Board for Technical and

Comprehensive Education (hereafter referred to as "State Tech"), which began flextime implementation in 1982. They are found as Appendix B.

The State Tech guidelines were modeled after state guidelines.

Interviews with the personnel office of State Tech revealed effective operation of flextime. The 7:30 a.m. option, available in a majority of state agencies, was not offered by State Tech due to the need to coordinate "service options to the TEC colleges and the public." Thus, State Tech's flextime policy was much more conservative than that ultimately offered by Midlands Technical College.

E. Literature Search

Literature abounds on flextime in business and industry (Kim and Campagna, 1981; Curry and Haerer, 1981; Coltrin and Barendse, 1981; Gomez-Mejia et al, 1978), and in government (Donahue, 1975; Finkle, 1979; Ronen, 1981; Craddock, et al.). Positive impacts were found with few exceptions (Rainey, 1982).

The literature on flextime in higher education is scant. Zalusky (1977) and Steen (1977) wrote of flextime in descriptive context along with other flexible work innovations as job sharing, flex year, and shorter work weeks. The literature abounds with examples of the related topic of the four-day work week in higher education (Hutton, et al. 1982, Stuckman, 1982, Wallace, 1981). No case studies were found of the application of nonfaculty flextime in higher education.

F. Existing Personnel Policies and Procedures

Members of the quality circle interviewed the college's personnel director for possible flextime conflicts with existing personnel policies and procedures.

It was determined that restrictions would be needed on the types of positions eligible for flextime.

Obviously, faculty employees would be excluded.

Certain departments already had schedules of flexible and varying schedules for some employees. Among these were night librarian, maintenance employees and counselors on evening schedules. Their schedules would remain intact, not subject to flextime.

It was decided that core hours would be from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Telephone coverage would be required from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. This requirement could mean that in some small departments, some individuals may not get their initial choice on flexible hours.

Academic secretarial and clerical personnel could have the option of flextime if telephone coverage of their area could be arranged. This would be most beneficial in work areas where two or more departmental secretaries worked contiguously or near the same area. Such "covering" had been observed to exist already on an informal basis.

III. Implementation

The first quality circle management presentation was made to Dr. Morris, August 25, 1984. The group proposed flextime. All research documentation was provided to the president well in advance of the presentation for his review. After each member of the circle made a presentation on some aspect of the process or findings of their problem solving, Dr. Morris approved flextime on a trial basis. He appointed a committee composed of representatives of each area to oversee the policy and evaluate it.

The Personnel Office was assigned overall administration of the policy.

It was stressed to employees that hours would be monitored and controlled by supervisors. Supervisory control was considered to be more effective than instituting time clocks or sign-in sheets.

A flextime work schedule choice sheet was required to be signed by each eligible employee to be approved by the supervisor. It is found as Appendix C. It was maintained on file by the Personnel Office. Any alterations would need supervisory approval.

During the trial period, 45 percent of the individuals changed their work schedule from the regular 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Thus, fewer actually opted for changed hours than so indicated on the initial survey.

Departments would not be able to alter the adopted variable work schedule except for substantial cause. This requirement would lend some permanence to chosen hours. It would overcome problems of frequent work hour changes. Many indicated on the feasibility survey that they would wait until permanent implementation to change their work hours.

The establishment of a schedule of flexible hours would not preclude the individual's attendance at necessary meetings scheduled for hours outside his or her work hours.

Each vice-president would be responsible for interpretation of flextime policy questions for his area.

There would be an impact assessment after two months of operations. The summative evaluation would be by both survey and feedback on problems.

The pilot phase of flextime implementation was so uneventful and devoid of problems as to commend permanent implementation, per se. The Personnel Department, which was in charge of implementation, reported virtually no problems.

IV. Conclusion

All flextime-eligible staff was surveyed in early January, 1985.

To the question of convenience of the flextime policy for the individual and his work area, 63.4 percent saw it as convenient, 0.9 percent inconvenient, and 35.6 percent no impact. The only perception of inconvenience occurred in the Student Development Services area.

A total of 53.3 percent perceived the policy to be convenient versus 13.3 percent perceiving it inconvenient. One-third of the department heads foresaw no impact from flextime.

There were 40.0 percent of non-academic department heads considering flextime to be a help in their areas, 13.3 percent considering it to hurt in their area, and 46.7 percent considering it to have little impact.

Contrasted to nearly half the staff opting for the 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. option in the pre-implementation survey, only 15.3 percent actually opted for this time period. Other hours chosen were: 8:00 to 4:30, 38.4 percent; 8:30 to 5:00, 30.7 percent, and 9:00 to 5:30, 15.3 percent.

None of the supervisors surveyed foresaw abuse of flextime in their area, with 13.3 percent not sure. Eighty percent of supervisors felt flextime would work for non-faculty personnel at the college.

To the question of how flextime affected work in the respondent's area, 43.9 percent felt it helped, and 56.1 percent perceived little impact. No respondents felt it hurt work in their area.

To the question of flextime abuse in the respondent's area, only one percent perceived abuse, 99 percent did not. The Student Development Services area was the division having the lone negative response.

As to whether the college should continue a policy of flextime, the response was only slightly less positive: 91.9 percent favored flextime continuation and 8.1 percent did not.

The findings clearly underscored the impression of smooth operation of flextime. The college's executive staff approved the continuation of flextime.

There were 54.7 percent maintaining their regular hours of work. Contrasted to the pre-implementation expectation of 45 percent choosing 7:30 to 4:00, only 15 percent actually did so.

The college's flextime policy was conservative, not allowing the banking of hours, nor the variability of hours daily or weekly.

Although the findings of Midlands Technical College were positive as in virtually all the literature, most of the research is "soft." Rainey (1982) conducted "hard" research which went beyond impressionistic surveys. His findings were that negative employees remain so despite the innovation. Short-term positive effects may dissipate over time.

Although many higher education institutions have personnel that work hours that vary from the core hours during the day, the model presented by Midlands Technical College provides a good case study for others to emulate. Formal flextime would probably not work as well in institutions which are smaller with small staff units, and in those which are conservative, lacking in trust, and not open to new innovations.

Ultimately, avoiding the expectation that flextime will be a panacea, allowing for thorough pre-implementation planning, and ensuring strict controls are the factors which will be determinant of successful flextime implementation.

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Appendix A

VARIABLE WORK HOURS GUIDELINES

Section I Scope and Purpose

To alieviate severe traffic congestion and delays during peak traffic hours, the various agencies and institutions of State government are authorized, at the discretion of the agency head, to develop and implement variable work schedules under the authority vested in the Budget and Control Board and within the guidelines set forth in this policy.

Section II Guidelines

The following are the criteria under which variable work schedules may be developed and implemented:

1. The core hours for each agency implementing variable work schedules shall be from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. During this time period all of the work force must be on the job. Switchboards shall be operating at least between the hours of 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
2. The assignment of hours of work for individual employees or operational units shall be at the discretion of the agency head or his designee. In adopting any variable work schedule, agencies shall assure adequate coverage to meet their service obligations to the public.
3. Adequate supervision shall be provided at all times.
4. Agencies shall not alter the adopted variable work schedules for individuals except for substantial cause.
5. Normally, one hour lunch periods shall be observed except when special circumstances dictate otherwise. No portion of the lunch hour should be used in making up time for a variable work schedule. Lunch periods shall be scheduled between the hours of 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

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Appendix B

INTER-OFFICE MEMORANDUM

STATE BOARD FOR TECHNICAL AND COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION

DATE: June 7, 1982

TO: Central Office Coordinators

FROM: Office of Personnel

SUBJECT: Employee Work Schedule

Since the move into our new offices in the Koger Executive Center some employee work schedules have been changed.

To update information on file relating to scheduled employee work hours and/or flex time, please complete the attached form listing all employees in your department and their scheduled work hours as approved by you. Submit this to your Associate Executive Director for review and concurrence by June 10, 1982, and to the Executive Director by June 15, 1982.

In adopting employee work schedules for your department the following should be taken into consideration:

1. The core hours for variable work schedules shall be from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. During this time period all of the work force must be on the job. Telephone coverage provided at least between the hours of 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

2. In adopting any variable work schedule, departments shall assure adequate coverage to meet their service obligations to the TEC colleges and the public.

3. Adequate supervision shall be provided at all times.

4. Departments shall not alter the adopted variable work schedules for individuals except for substantial cause.

5. No portion of the lunch hour should be used in making up time for a variable work schedule. Lunch hours shall be scheduled between the hours of 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

Appendix C

_____ WORK SCHEDULE

Employee's Name	Scheduled Work Hours	
	From	To

APPROVED:

_____
Coordinator

_____
Associate Executive Director